1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
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development and characteristics of this emergent great tradition. In seeking such understanding, attention has been focused on the shifting historical pressures for and against acculturation and assimilation, and on the impact of a spreading market economy, industrialization and political democracy. Though this is not at all a monograph purporting to tell all about a particular people, the events described are largely the experience of a single tribe, the Santal, who live primarily on the Chotanagpur Plateau of Bihar, West Bengal, and northern Orissa in India. This is, then, in part "their story," understood often in terms peculiar to their experience. Nevertheless, the experiences of the Santal suggest certain widely prevalent processes which I call the "rank concession syndrome." These processes are speculatively held to pertain to all part-societies which have conceded rank to a dominant surrounding society. In particular the pressures for and against assimilation are regarded as crucial determinants and these in turn are seen to depend significantly upon shifting avenues of mobility. Movements of self-conscious cultural creativity are viewed in relation to the conflicting stimuli generated by pressures for and against assimilation. There are adequate if not compelling theoretical and practical reasons for making the Santal the object of such a study. The characteristically primitive world-view and social organization of traditional Santal culture provides a sufficiently contrasting background against which to view the impact of such modern conditions as the market, industrial employment and political democracy. Similarly the heavy commitment to pursuit of pleasure and the characteristically unreflective character of traditional Santal culture contrast sharply with the dominant surrounding Brahmanical tradition. Their patterns of social interaction and group structure rest heavily upon a markedly patrilineal kinship system

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closely paralleling that of their Hindu neighbors. On the other hand, their social organization is relatively lacking in the cleavages of caste which are so prevalent all about them. Apart from the village, which is usually composed of a number of patrilineal kin-groups, territorial organization is weakly developed, and the tribe as a whole has never been politically unified so far as historical records indicate.

Even as a unique people the Santal merit special attention. Numbering today over three million, the region they occupy contains the richest deposits of iron, coal and other crucial industrial minerals in all of India. The chief source of their livelihood, at least since the nineteenth century, has been settled agriculture. Prior to the nineteenth century, hunting was also an important livelihood activity, but the great increase in the region's population and subsequent reduction of forest areas has made game extremely scarce; it is now difficult for the inhabitants even to obtain materials for fuel and building purposes. Though the chief source of food and cash is the annual rice crop, a few vegetables are also grown and some fruit trees maintained. Some villages are near enough to a river for fish to be readily obtained, while some villages stock their local ponds. Even prior to the introduction of modern industry in the region, the Santal had ceased to be economically independent. Although they once did some pottery making, weaving, and even iron smelting, they have come to rely almost exclusively on various local Hindu castes for these material products. Women from several low Hindu castes are used frequently as midwives. While almost no Santal are ritually served by Brahmin priests, itinerant Hindu holy men (*sadhu*) visit many Santal villages, consulting horoscopes and offering prayers for a fee or donation.

Most Santal are still agriculturists, but some have turned to

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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614 Thus theoretically speaking at least, each of its group is exogamous as far as its own group is concerned, but endogamous in relation to the other groups, who are *Bòndhus*, subject to a variety of other restrictions, as we shall soon see in detail. [174] Broadly speaking, this arrangement points to the existence of a dual division among the Santals in the past for matrimonial purposes.

It may be noted here that the various Santal clans have their own *gadi* (original seats). If it so chances that a Santal finds his own *gadi*, the same with that of others, his attraction is stronger towards his clan-group than to his other relatives, however near they may be. Thus there is a solid tie among the [783] [784] *Jàtià Peras* (friends of the same blood) belonging to the same clan, all of whose members undergo ceremonial pollution on the death of one of the clan. [571] Thus clan-ties amongst Santals transcend even degrees of relationship.

[428] [691] [611] The son inherits the clan-name of his father and lives with his father as of right. The father is the natural guardian of the children, and the way in which descent is reckoned is patrilineal. The [562] Santal wife has no legal status in the eye of tribal urisprudence; she is simply bought and belongs to the husband's family as a chattel. And the type [594] of family that centres round the father as the head, may be characterised as patripotestal.

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They owe their present position of affluence to Santal habits of insobriety. Secondly, much of the land has been acquired by trading castes from Bihar who followed the Santals when the country was being opened up. They brought with them such things as salt and cooking oil, which they exchanged for grain. Clothing was added at a later date, for until within living memory Santals largely wove their own clothes from cotton grown on the lands surrounding their homesteads. Like the Sundis, these traders provided credit facilities for their customers and so gained power over them. The monsoon fails on the average once in seven years in Western Bengal, and the traders import grain in times of scarcity. Formerly this was lent out at a recognized rate of interest amounting to 100 per cent. per annum. The only security which a Santal had to offer was a mortgage on his land, and, if the trader wished it, the almost inevitable result was an action in the courts, followed by an auction at which the creditor purchased the land. The third important class among the landlords are the Brahmins, descendants of the men who were brought into the country to act as priests and court officials to the local *rajas* or rulers. At the time when British rule was being established many of these *rajas* exercised control over tracts of country that were largely covered by forest and sparsely inhabited. They encouraged Santals and some other peoples to settle as cultivators, and they also rewarded the services of their Brahmin officials by grants of land. Brahmins are forbidden by caste rules to engage in cultivation, so they in their turn encouraged Santals to become their tenants.

The Santals have a proverb: "A *Deko* friend is like a thorn fence." In other words, if you stumble into it you are liable to suffer from scratches. They sometimes make fun of themselves and exaggerate the fear that they feel. Thus: "The elders used to run away and hide in the jungle whenever they saw an umbrella approaching the village." But in spite of the fun, the fear persists. A difficulty arose a few years ago in a village Santal church when the superintending missionary placed there as pastor a man who was a *Deko*. This resulted in a vigorous protest, and the leader of the villagers' delegation summed up their feelings in the following parable: "When a kite is wheeling overhead the chickens all take shelter under their mother's wings. After they have grown up they know that the kite can do them no harm, but nevertheless whenever a kite is overhead they quake inwardly and cannot get on with their pecking." In the company of non-Santals, a Santal is inclined to become tongue-

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829 tied. Even men who enjoy a wide reputation in their own tribe
• 571 become ineffectual when engaging in a discussion with *Deko*, a factor which nullifies many of the advantages that they might otherwise gain by their representation on local self-governing bodies. The difficulty is not simply one of language, for those who reach such positions are men of some education who have a command of Bengali; it is caused by the old fear of the chicken for the bird of prey. Santals themselves complain that their own representatives are not "cunning" enough.

648 With certain of the lower castes who are cultivators like
829 themselves the Santals claim a special relationship. Chief among these are the Kurmi or Mahato, who are looked upon as distant kinsfolk. "Formerly", said an informant, "they used to look on us as their younger brothers. At their weddings we used to carry away their baskets of sweets, and in fact without our presence their weddings could not take place. They sacrifice pigs at the time of the *Sohrae*. Our ancestors used to tell the story of how [539] during the rule of the Moslems the Kurmi were oppressed. They had great trouble to survive. It is said that one day when we Santals were celebrating a *Mak' Mõŋẽ* festival, a band of Moslems was driving a group of Mahato before them. They came right into the place where we were sacrificing, but even so they did not lose caste. In this way they are co-sharers with the Santals." Here, however, is some Santal lore that is not altogether to the credit of the Mahato: "All the Mahato women have to learn witchcraft. If any of them does not do so, she cannot get married. For this reason when a Mahato party is seeking a bride the first question which they ask is, 'Has she learnt witchcraft or not?' "

563 There are other stories of related peoples, e.g. the Deswali,
[829] who are said to have resulted from the union of a local *raja* with a Santal girl, and there are a number of castes with whom they live in close contact. The most interesting of these is the Kamar caste, workers in iron. The Santals would appear to have been using iron implements both in agriculture and in hunting for a very long period, but they do not work in iron themselves. Until comparatively recently, iron smelting from ore gathered on the hillsides was common and the smelting was done by the Kamars. Modern industry has brought this to an end, but the sites of old furnaces can still be identified by the heaps of iron slag, which the Santals call "iron excrement". The Kamars, however, are still blacksmiths. Every moderate-sized village contains a family of Kamars who have been granted a piece of land from the

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their tribal dances, the activity takes on a self-conscious quality which is quite unable to stand up to the general assumption of the Bengali community that these dances are fit only for the uneducated and "simple" villager. The education of girls follows a somewhat different pattern. For many years the Christians were slow in taking advantage of facilities for girls' education and the numbers in the girls' school were comparatively small. To a former generation girls were destined to the life of village housewives, and the education provided was not only irrelevant but it positively endangered the success of their daughters in marriage. Many of the older generation and some of the younger express a preference for illiterate wives who need less clothes and become proficient in house and field work by living at home. In school the girls live a sheltered life. Although agricultural training is given both to boys and girls in school through the care of gardens and through work on the rice fields belonging to the mission, such activity is regarded as an extra and some parents have voiced the view that it is a form of exploitation! In recent years, however, a change has come over the general attitude towards girls' education owing to the growth of a small number of economically independent unmarried women whose earnings are valuable to their families and also to the rise of a demand for educated wives by a section of the men. The changing attitude was illustrated by the fact that when in 1937, as a result of a change in policy, the girls were housed in cottages constructed as nearly as possible on the lines of a Santal village, there was considerable opposition from the parents. They objected that the girls would have too much housework in addition to their studies.

A new class of Santal Christians has been created which sets the tone for changes in the community. The more intellectual members are lost to village life; they pass to High School or to other training and many of them retain only slender links with their village homes. They follow a wide range of occupations unknown to Santals of the older generation, in government service, as paid mission agents, and in recent years they have begun to enter the ranks of industrial workers in the city. Girls have become nurses and teachers. The local leaders of the Church are largely salaried members of the mission staff who are "compound" centred rather than village minded. Their small but regular wages have made them better off than the great majority of the peasants among whom they work; and one result is that the latter do not invariably follow the lead they are given.